

SENATE BILL REPORT

ESHB 1835

As Passed Senate, February 28, 2024

Title: An act relating to defining frontier counties.

Brief Description: Defining frontier counties.

Sponsors: House Committee on Innovation, Community & Economic Development, & Veterans (originally sponsored by Representatives Kretz, Chapman, Maycumber, Tharinger, Harris and Dent).

Brief History: Passed House: 2/9/24, 94-3.

Committee Activity: Local Government, Land Use & Tribal Affairs: 2/15/24, 2/20/24 [DP].

Floor Activity: Passed Senate: 2/28/24, 49-0.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Adds a definition of frontier county to statutes governing public facilities grants and loans, excise taxes, and the Department of Commerce.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT, LAND USE & TRIBAL AFFAIRS

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Lovelett, Chair; Salomon, Vice Chair; Torres, Ranking Member; Kauffman and Short.

Staff: Maggie Douglas (786-7279)

Background: A rural county is defined as a county with a population density less than 100 persons per square mile or a county smaller than 225 square miles, as determined by the Office of Financial Management. Several statutes use this definition for tax and other

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assistance programs, including but not limited to statutes referencing public facilities loans and grants, the coordination of community and economic development services, and excise taxes. Currently, there are 30 counties that meet the rural county definition.

Summary of Bill: The definition of frontier county is added to the statutes governing public facilities grants and loans, excise taxes, and the Department of Commerce. A frontier county is defined as a county with a population density of fewer than 50 persons per square mile. A frontier one county has a population density of 21 or fewer persons per square mile. A frontier two county has a population density of more than 21 but fewer than 50 persons per square mile.

A frontier county is also a rural county and is eligible for all benefits, services, and programs available to a rural county, unless specifically excluded.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: This bill does not add any new spending to the state budget and does not add any new policy. This bill adds a definition to better serve the most rural parts of the state and target improvements more specifically. It is a merging of federal statute with state statute. It helps to leverage more infrastructure money for an area that is underserved.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Representative Joel Kretz, Prime Sponsor; Michael Moran, Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.